

Soil and water district will host open house

By

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IVN Contributing Writer

The Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District (IVSWCD) will host a kick-off event for Deer Creek landowners on Saturday, October 19.

The informational presentation is slated to take place at the Selma Community and Education Center from 9 a.m. to noon and is offered especially for agricultural producers to drop in at their convenience to meet new staff member Kevin Kocarek, and discuss efforts to improve their shared resource, the Middle Deer Creek riparian zone. For those interested, there will be short presentations at 9:30, 10:30 and 11:30 a.m.

IVSWCD offers the opportunity for free assessments of property owners' stream and land interface, and grants to provide troughs for livestock to limit stream bank erosion.

"We're not a regulatory agency," said IVSWCD District Manager Kevin O'Brien. "We don't wear badges. We're just trying to make life better for everyone by improving riparian conditions."

The Oregon State Legislature has set a goal of improving water quality and asked the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to develop measurement standards toward that goal. According to O'Brien, IVSWCD is actually ahead of the curve in their program to improve riparian health. They are planning activities such as providing buffer strips along Illinois Valley streams to limit livestock access and measuring stream temperatures and changes in the chemical balance of the water — especially in regard to E. coli and herbicide levels.

New Stream Team Member

Kevin Kocarek is the new IVSWCD Water Quality Specialist,

following in the footsteps of Nancy Smebak, who left the position to pursue further education. His work on the Middle Deer Creek Focus Area will include planting riparian areas with Pacific Willow cuttings in order to provide more shade for the water and fish, stabilize the stream bank to limit erosion and soil loss and help filter sediment and pollution. This program is co-sponsored by ODA and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Kocarek's previous professional experience included working as a fish biologist for the BLM and doing stream restoration for Rogue River tributaries in the Ashland and Butte Falls Resource Areas.

"We were extremely impressed by the quality of the applicants for the position," O'Brien said. "I'm personally excited to have Kevin join us, and I have every confidence he'll do an outstanding job."

Kocarek has a Bachelor of Science degree in Sustainable Resource Management from Ohio State University with an emphasis on sustainable resource management practices. During the past 10 years of working in the Rogue Valley, he's interacted with all the federal, local and state agencies, and feels that experience will assist him in his new role.

"My first step is always to listen to landowners and

see what they want," Kocarek said. "I meet with them to walk the property. Then I develop solutions to implement plans and identify grant funding for projects. It is just a great opportunity to help ranchers improve their land."

As a fish biologist for the BLM, Kocarek worked collaboratively with farmers and ranchers in the Rogue Valley to develop practical solutions to resource needs and create water delivery systems to improve ranching efficiency.

"I built fences that improved grazing rotations while protecting stream banks and fish habitat," he said. "I've never met a rancher that didn't care about the environment as

they depend on the land for a living. By listening, I can usually come up with solutions while also improving habitat. My favorite example of this is assisting a land owner to secure creek banks that were eroding the field away. I'm proud I was able to save important land from being sent downstream."

Kocarek said he grew up in a farming community and helped his dad raise sheep and goats.

"I have fond memories of fixing fence lines on our property, as it taught me important lessons," Kocarek said. "If I missed fixing a weak link in the fence, I had to find and herd the goats back to our land, sometimes from miles away. If you've ever worked

with goats you know that they are masters of escape. I think it taught me to pay attention to details and to check and re-check my work."

Although IVSWCD will focus on the Middle Deer Creek area over the next two years, O'Brien hastens to mention the organization will continue to serve the entire valley.

"We're not going away," he said. "And for the next biennium we'll have a different focus."

O'Brien listed several possibilities, including a fuels reduction project on Thompson Creek over the coming years. For more information, call IVSWCD at 541-592-3731 or email kkocarek@ivstreamteam.org.



(Photo by Judy Hoyle, Illinois Valley News)

IVSWCD District Manager Kevin O'Brien and Water Quality Specialist Kevin Kocarek discuss the Middle Deer Creek focus area.

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